

1 Abstract of the Disclosure

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3 The invention provides a technique to prevent confusion between part numbers
4 used by different suppliers and manufacturers. The invention includes a database that (1) creates
5 an association between part numbers that are directed to comparable parts, (2) generates a uni-
6 versal number for comparable parts, and (3) creates an association between the part numbers and
7 the universal part. This set of associations is used to generate documents that include part num-
8 bers that the recipient of the document is familiar with. Limitations are placed on what authori-
9 ties may provide information about a set of associations. Generally, only the supplier of a part or
10 the supplier of a comparable part may create associations between their parts. This limitation
11 helps maintain the integrity of information in the database. This database is coupled to a shared
12 service network such as a hub for design collaboration or supply chain control.

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